

## The Problem

Smoothbark St. John's-wort and its associated rare plants are sensitive to certain human activities that result in the loss of the plants. The very limited distribution of Smoothbark St. John's-wort and the increasing residential development around these ponds and lakes pose a serious threat to the survival of this species. For it to survive, property owners need to take action to reduce or eliminate the sources of damage to the plant.

## What You Can Do

You can play a large role in conserving these rare plants and at the same time help protect your pond's water quality and prevent erosion on your valuable property by following a few simple guidelines.

## Some Guidelines To Follow

*It is best to leave all the vegetation around the lake edge. But if you must clear some:*

**Minimize the clearing of vegetation** around your pond or lake. It is suggested that no more than a 25-foot wide corridor be cleared through the Smoothbark St. John's-wort community on any given lot. Consider a narrow floating dock for access to the water.

**Share access with a neighbor** to minimize the need for removing plants.

**Avoid using fertilizers and pesticides** which can easily run off into the pond, affecting water quality.

**Landscape with low-maintenance native plants** and replant cleared areas to help prevent erosion.

**Encourage your neighbors to follow these guidelines.**



## Property Owners of Sandhill Ponds and Lakefront

For additional information,  
please contact Mr. Jess Van Dyke,  
Florida Department of  
Environmental Protection  
at 850/245-2809,  
or Mr. Jon Blanchard,  
The Nature Conservancy  
P.O. Box 393, Bristol, FL 32321-0393  
at 850/643-2756.  
email: [jblanchard@tnc.org](mailto:jblanchard@tnc.org)

This document is a cooperative effort  
between Lisa A. and Edwin J. Keppner  
of the Bay Environmental Study Team,  
Bay County, Florida,  
and The Nature Conservancy.

## THE PLANT AROUND THE EDGE OF THIS LAKE IS ENDANGERED

While it may seem locally plentiful, Smooth-bark St. John's-wort is found nowhere else in the world. It is limited to the edges of the sandhill ponds and lakes of northern Bay and southern Washington Counties. Several other species of rare plants also occur around these ponds and lakes.

Every section of waterfront cleared brings this plant closer to extinction. Please help by considering alternatives to clearing the shoreline and by sharing this information with your neighbors.

## A Very Rare Plant

Found nowhere else on earth except in this small area of karst ponds and lakes, Smoothbark St. John's-wort or *Hypericum lissophloens* is familiar to anyone who lives on or has visited one of these ponds or lakes. It can be found in dense, broad bands around some of the ponds and can be quite scarce around others where a variety of other woody plants dominate the water's edge.

This plant is woody with slender stems, grows to a height of about 13 feet, and grows in water from about 4 feet deep to the high water line. The flowers are yellow, and the smooth bark sloughs off in curled plates exposing the smooth, shiny inner bark. Those plants growing partially submerged produce prop roots along the lower part of the stem that give the plant the look of a red mangrove tree.



**Smoothbark St. John's Wort**  
(*Hypericum lissophloens*)

## What Are the Karst Ponds?

The northern part of Bay County and the southern part of Washington County, Florida, west of Econfinia Creek is an area of jewel-like ponds and lakes with clear, clean water and sandy, vegetated shorelines. Most of these ponds and lakes were formed in sandy soil by water dissolving the underlying limestone. The ponds tend to be circular, slope to the water's edge, and appear on aerial photographs as an area of water surrounded by a ring of vegetation. Most do not have an obvious inflow or outflow of water.



Map showing locations of karst ponds

## Why Are They Important?

Water entering the ponds is primarily from rain and surface runoff, and drainage is through the bottom of the pond to the underlying aquifer. Thus, many of these ponds and lakes serve as recharge areas for the underlying Floridan Aquifer that supplies us with high quality surface and well water. Water levels in the ponds can vary greatly. They fill rapidly during the rainy season, and then drain slowly providing a steady flow of water to the aquifer. Because these lakes and ponds provide water directly to the aquifer, it is important to maintain the high quality of the water entering the ponds.

## Karst Ponds are a Unique Habitat

The karst ponds and lakes of this region provide habitat that supports a number of plants considered to be threatened or endangered.

## Other Rare Plants in the Karst Habitat

Associated with the Smoothbark St. John's-wort are other plants that are adapted to the same conditions and are considered rare because of their limited distribution in Florida.

### The Panhandle Meadowbeauty

(*Rhexia salicifolia*) is about 12-18 inches tall, has four lavender petals, and yellow, hook-shaped stamens.

### Quillwort Yelloweyed Grass

(*Xyris isoetifolia*) and **Kral's Yelloweyed Grass** (*Xyris longisepala*) are similar in appearance with small yellow flowers that emerge one at a time from a cone-like enlargement at the end of a stalk.

### Threadleaf Sundew

(*Drosera filiformis*) is a carnivorous plant that has thread-like leaves covered with red-purple, sticky glands.

### Crystal Lake Whitlow-wort

(*Paronychia chartacea* subspecies *minima*) forms a bright green, round mat only a few inches tall, with forked stems and tiny white flowers. (see below)

